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Cable
Text:

S E C R E T ABU DHABI 04411

SIPDIS

CXABU:

ACTION: AMB
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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7080
INFO RUEHWW/GULF WAR COLLECTIVE
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RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 0858
RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL 0196
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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 03 ABU DHABI 004411

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/30/2014
TAGS: PREL PGOV MARR AF IR IZ SA SY TC
SUBJECT: CENTCOM CDR VISITS UAE

Classified by Ambassador Michele J. Sison. Reasons 1.5 (a) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: During his November 28-30 visit to UAE, Commander USCENTCOM General Abizaid met Abu Dhabi Crown Prince/UAE Armed Forces Chief of Staff Mohammed bin Zayed (MbZ) and Dubai Crown Prince/UAE MinDef Shaikh Mohammed bin Rashid (MbR); toured Jebel Ali port and Al Dhafra and Minhad Air Bases; and visited aboard the USS Essex. General Abizaid's discussions focused on UAE's important role as a stable and successful model for the region, Iraq, and U.S. military expansion efforts at key UAE installations. End Summary.

UAE Succession, Stability

¶2. (C) CENTCOM Commander Abizaid visited Dubai the evening of November 28 to dine with Dubai Crown Prince Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum. Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed (MbZ) joined MbR, along with Interior Minister Sheikh Saif and Dubai SSD Director Mohammed Al Qamzi. General Abizaid opened the conversation by offering his condolences on the death of late President Zayed. MbR noted that according to the UAE constitution, his brother Maktoum (titular UAE Prime Minister) was to have served as acting UAE President for 30 days. He and Maktoum had discussed this, however, and had agreed that it would make more sense to avoid an interim period. When this idea was put to Sheikh Khalifa, MbR reported, Khalifa initially

rejected it, insisting that Maktoum remain the acting President until the rulers of the seven emirates could agree upon a new President. MbR then spoke up in the presence of the other rulers, and said "We rulers have already all decided that you should become President, and now." In reality, MbR told Abizaid, he had not actually discussed this in advance with the others, but once he had made the announcement, they could not contradict him. Khalifa accepted the Presidency, thereby avoiding a period of uncertainty.

¶3. (U) General Abizaid congratulated the UAE on the smooth and peaceful transition. He also expressed admiration for the UAE's market-oriented growth strategy and economic diversification. MbR and MbZ welcomed General Abizaid's description of the UAE as a model for other economies in the region, especially those struggling with violence and extremism.

Iraq

¶4. (S/NF) During the dinner hosted by MbR on 11/28, and at his dinner with MbZ on 11/29, General Abizaid thanked the Emirati leaders for UAE's support for U.S. and Coalition efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan. He expressed appreciation for U.S. access to Al Dhafra Air Base and logistical support, and cited the ongoing training at the Gulf Air Warfare Center as a key example of bilateral cooperation. On Iraq, General Abizaid emphasized several times that recent operations in Fallujah had revealed surprising information about the identity of those who were providing financial support for the terrorists there. It was important to crack down on those who had been sending money to Fallujah. It was not a case of charity going astray, but a case of people giving money directly to the insurgents. Those donors were as guilty as the insurgents themselves. The U.S. would be providing names to the UAE soon. MbZ and MbR indicated that they shared Abizaid's perspective. MbR reported that his State Security Directorate had recently uncovered a network of people, one of whom headed a company in Dubai, that was providing transportation assistance to fighters headed to Fallujah and safe havens to terrorists fleeing Fallujah. (Additional information on this development passed septel.)

¶5. (C) MbZ mentioned to General Abizaid that he had first-hand information that to him suggested a clear link between Saddam and Al Qaeda: his personnel in Afghanistan had seen land mines originally provided by the Italians to Saddam that had been used (presumably by the Taliban) in Afghanistan. MbR expressed irritation that Al-Jazeera and other Arab satellite TV stations didn't show US troops "eating and fighting" alongside Iraqis. But at the following evening's dinner, MbZ and his brother, nformation Minister Sheikh Abdullah, voiced disdain of Al-Jazeera for its broadcast of the latest Ayman al-Zawahiri videotape.

¶6. (C) MbZ said he was impressed by the positive coverage shown on Fox News of what the U.S. was doing in Iraq -- building schools and hospitals. MbZ urged the U.S. not to allow captured prisoners to appear on TV unless they had first been "roughed up for a day" by Iraqi security forces. "When you put them on TV in nice clothes, with no bruises and their noses still straight," he said, it sent a message to other potential fighters that "if you go to be a martyr, this is how you will be treated." The U.S. needed to avoid sending the message that people who attacked us would be treated well.

¶7. (C) MbR urged the U.S. to find "peaceful Sunnis" to run in the Iraqi elections so that "the Shi'a don't take it all." It was also important to work quickly to improve the economic situation. MbZ asked whether the elections could be delayed. His concern was not the likely lack of Sunni participation; they could participate in the next elections. What worried him was the strong Iranian influence. Yes, most Shi'a Arabs would vote first as Arabs, but many had been in Iran for many years and their votes will reflect that. Abizaid responded that any delay in the elections would be a political

decision, but that in his opinion it was best to move forward. MbZ asked about Sistani: he liked the man; saw him as a force for stability who quieted people, but wondered why he still had an Iranian passport. Why couldn't he apply for an Iraqi one?

¶ 8. (C) The following evening, MbZ again expressed great concern about the potential of a post-election Iraq heavily influenced by Tehran. General Abizaid observed that a stable Iraq was also in Iran's interest and it was not helpful for Iran or Syria or any other nation to interfere with the process of stability in Iraq. It was important for the U.S. signal that our goal was to ensure stability and to fight extremism. Extremists would, given the opportunity, attack any government in the region. It was not in Iran --or Syria's -- interest for such extremists to succeed. MbZ told General Abizaid that his brother, Sheikh Abdullah, had a "strong" relationship with Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. MbZ suggested that Abdullah should make a visit to Damascus soon to underline to Bashar that Saudi and other extremists represented a threat to him and his country. If Syria was a hub for Al Qaeda and Ansar al Islam to move extremists into Iraq, then Bashar's sophisticated security services should be aware of this activity, MbZ and Abdullah averred. Perhaps Bashar was not well-served by his subordinates, or perhaps some of them were being paid off.

Saudi Arabia

¶ 9. (C) General Abizaid asked MbZ and MbR how they saw the situation in Saudi Arabia. Was the country moving in the right direction internally? MbR responded that, whereas leaders like he and MbZ "looked out 100 kilometers," the Saudi leadership looked out "only 2 kilometers." With no long-term vision they had allowed extremists to become powerful, and now the region was suffering. MbZ added that the Saudi leadership was "too old."

Afghanistan/Pakistan

¶ 10. (S) General Abizaid told MbZ and MbR that UAE troops in Afghanistan were doing a good job; President Karzai was very grateful. MbZ responded that the UAE was likewise very satisfied with its special forces' efforts in Afghanistan. Abizaid said the U.S. was in general pleased with the progress in Afghanistan. The U.S. had recently killed seven Al Qaeda there, and the information on their computers had revealed that they had been there since August, but had been unable to carry out any operations. Next door, Musharraf was doing a very good job. MbZ agreed that Musharraf was an important player, and urged the U.S. to support him.

Dubai Port Visit

¶ 11. (C) General Abizaid toured the Jebel Ali Port and Free Zone on 11/29, receiving a briefing on ambitious expansion plans by Managing Director Jamal Al-Majid. Al-Majid emphasized that expansion was necessary because it was clear the region was going to need greater capacity, particularly as Iraq emerged as a strong market. The Iraqis moved quickly when they spotted an opportunity; for example, the number of used cars being shipped from Dubai to Iraq had recently skyrocketed. Likewise, business with China was up dramatically. Business with Iran was strong and steady; activity at Bandar Abbas port had recently grown by 25-30 percent, but the capacity at that port was now maxed out, with no room for further increases. Noting that there had been some 630 US Navy ship visits to UAE ports Dubai and Fujairah in the previous year, General Abizaid expressed appreciation for the excellent support from Jebel Ali.

USS Essex, Minhad AFB

¶12. (C) Following lunch on board the USS Essex and a tour of "Shed 66" (the Navy's warehousing facility in the port), General Abizaid boarded a helicopter for a trip to the UAE military's Minhad Air Base, where the UAE recently completed, at a cost of \$20 million, a large warehouse and ramp facility that will facilitate provision of supplies to U.S. Navy ships in the Gulf. The facilities were completed in late September 2004, but remain unused pending further discussions between USG and UAEG. (Note: The UAE has asked for a single government-to-government agreement covering U.S. tenancy at all UAE military facilities rather than NAVCENT and CENTAF efforts to obtain separate agreements for their respective initiatives at Minhad and Al Dhafra. Action on this UAEG request has stalled due to Defense Cooperation Agreement concerns. Although the DCA was signed in 1994 by MbZ, the UAE contends that the agreement was never ratified by the UAE Supreme Council -- Rulers of the seven Emirates and is therefore non-binding.)

¶13. (C) During his 11/29 dinner with MbZ, General Abizaid broached the issue of Al Minhad Air Base and asked what could be done to move forward. After reminding the General that the UAE had paid for the Minhad facilities, MbZ stated that the U.S. and the UAE need to negotiate a basing agreement. General Abizaid responded that the U.S.-UAE relationship, built on mutual trust and respect, was one of the most important relationships in his AOR. He undertook to follow up on the basing issue with SECDEF.

¶14. (U) This cable was jointly drafted by ConGen Dubai and Embassy Abu Dhabi.

¶15. (U) This message was cleared by Commander USCENTCOM General Abizaid.

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